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Golden Gate Audubon Society Newsletter
Volume 77 • No. 3 March 1995

The Gull

Travels in Kenya: Safari Part II

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Monday - Mombasa 4:30 AM. The blurry-eyed members of the Golden Gate Audubon Kenya safari gathered in the Inter-continental Hotel restaurant for breakfast and coffee. Coffee ... thank goodness Kenya grows its own wonderful strong coffee! Well-caffeinated, we piled into our bus for the airport.

The success of a tour can depend on the quality of its leader and Francis Kitayi is a splendid one: not only is he an expert on Kenya's wildlife, but he is great at getting a bunch of tired, grumpy Auduboners and all their luggage through an airport smoothly. Francis shares his passion for his country and its wildlife in a way that makes you feel that he is experiencing the wonders of Kenya for the first time along with you. Shortly after the stewardess gave the seat-belt, tray-table, oxygen-mask talk in both English and Swahili, we were airborne. The highlight of the flight was a magnificent view of 19,340 ft. Mount Kilimanjaro. We had seen Kilimanjaro from Amboseli, but this high-altitude view of the mountain made the glacier-topped volcano seem even more impressive. We touched down in Nairobi, collected our bags, and were happy to be reacquainted with our drivers, Joseph and John.

Our next destination was 300 km north of Nairobi in Kenya's arid center: the Samburu National Reserve. After we had been on the road for some time, we started slowly to gain altitude as the road became a series of sweeping curves. The vegetation became lush and green. Although we could not see its 17,075 ft. summit through the clouds, we were skirting the base of another volcano: Mount Kenya. Eventually we began to drive down the volcano's north side and the landscape became drier with each passing kilometer. After the pavement ended at the town of Isiolo, once again

Ostrich, zebra and giraffe came into view. On close examination we could see that the Ostriches had blue legs and were of the Somali race. The zebra looked more mule-like, with narrower bars and white bellies which indicated they were Grevy's Zebra. The Masai Giraffe in Amboseli had blotchy spots as though they had been rubbed with mud, but the skin of these Reticulated Giraffes looked as though it had been so heavily caked with mud that it had cracked like the mud on the bottom of a dry pond. The flora was also different. Among the stands of Umbrella Acacias were Doum Palms, which can grow to 60 ft. and which are the only palms with branches.

Our accommodations were at the Samburu Game Lodge, which is located along the banks of the crocodile-infested Ewaso Ngiro River. Fortunately there is a stone wall around the buildings just high enough to keep the crocs out. Once or twice a day the staff throws a few bones over the wall. The crocs come slithering out of the water to snap up the food a few feet from the onlookers. After they have eaten, the animals return to the river bank and sleep until something else comes along. After an early morning flight, and a long drive, we were all ready to snap up dinner and head off to our bungalows to sleep until the morning game drive came along.

Tuesday. The morning game drive got off to a great start. We had only been out a short time when we noticed that all the vans were converging on the same area. John had spotted the Lions too and was maneuvering our van for a close look. We paralleled the pride of six females and young males as they walked along. Bringing up the rear was an adult male with a beautiful long mane. As they walked, the muscles in their legs rippled with power; at one point the male roared. The sound of a roaring Lion is

not unlike the sound of huge waves or of thunder; it's almost as much a physical feeling as it is a sound. The male and a large female settled down a short distance from us while other members of the pride walked between two vans stopped just in front of us. After a lot of ooh's and ah's and countless shutter clicks and motor-drive whirs, we moved on to see what else Samburu had to offer.

Our vans worked their way back to the wooded areas along the Ewaso Ngiro. Here many of Samburu's animals can graze in the shade and escape the gaze of hungry predators. We meandered along the lattice-work of trails and found gazelle, Impala, Eland, Bushbuck, Gerenuk, and the dog-sized Dikdik. I think, of the deer-like hoofed animals, the Gerenuk is my favorite. It is not as boldly marked as many of the other gazelles, but its body structure is amazing. Its long, long, slender neck and legs give it the appearance of an animal that does not respect earth's gravitational pull. With its long limbs, the Gerenuk is able to stand on its hind legs and forage on leaves and branches that are too high for other grazers and too low for giraffe. Watching the Gerenuk stretch its already elongated frame for that foliage that is just out of reach is like seeing evolution in progress.

Samburu has a wealth of birdlife as well. Along our drive through the trees we spotted Verreaux's Eagle Owls, Red-billed and Yellow-billed hornbills, Red-headed Weaver and the Violet Wood Hoopoe. Wood hoopoes look like huge, iridescent-black Brown Creepers with long curved red bills. The bird life is not restricted to the wooded areas. Throughout the open areas, Blacksmith and Crowned plovers are common. Small finches inhabit brush patches while pipits, Golden-breasted Buntings and White-headed Buffalo Weavers feed on the ground. But to keep your eyes on the ground would be a mistake. The sky was always dotted with many different species of eagles, hawks, and vultures. While driving together over an open area, Elliott Feigenbaum, (a self-proclaimed non-birder, and known to us all as Ollie), spotted a beautiful little bird that our tour had not seen. It had a green

back and wings, a blue rump, a buffy breast and a white throat. Everyone in the van was so delighted that they bestowed Elliott with an honor only given to great ornithologists. From that point on, the bird was known to us as Ollie's Somali Bee-eater. The large animals are so abundant and the birds so spectacular that even a non-birder can't help but be wowed by Kenya's avifauna between herds of elephants and prides of Lions.

After our successful morning game drive we returned to the lodge for lunch. Later some of us enjoyed a performance put on by traditional Samburu dancers. Samburu means butterfly in the Maa language. The name may be a reference to the tribe's nomadic nature. The dancers wore the traditional bright red and yellow skirts. Much of the dancing consisted of the spear-holding men leaping in groups or singly while the women flipped massive collections of beads off their chests to hand-clapped rhythms. The performance was as vivid musically as it was visually. Songs consisted of choral chants overlaid with calls and shouts while a man with a deep, gravelly voice sang the lead. The effect of the male voice contrasted with the women's high nasal voices was splendid. Although gospel, blues, and jazz are claimed to be American music, when listening to this music, their roots in the music of Africa are obvious.

The afternoon game drive was highlighted by Cheetah and Palmnut Vulture sightings. At dinner we celebrated another great day with the usual Tusker Beer. While waiting in line for a sample of Eland steak, a cat-like animal climbed down from a tree looking for handouts. It had large spots, big ears, a long lanky body and a long ringed tail: it was a Common Genet, a member of the mongoose family, and our last sighting of the day.

Wednesday. As wonderful as Samburu was, we had other parts of Kenya to explore. As we drove from the lodge back toward Isiolo we had another Cheetah sighting. Soon we were back on the paved roads and heading for the Ark in the Aberdare Mountains. As we drove past miles of wheat fields, I became

anxious with the anticipation of our visit to the Ark, a boat-shaped lodge high in the rain forest. The short time we would spend there would be our only chance to see the species associated with that habitat, but my real concern was that we might miss an animal formerly common throughout Kenya: rhinoceros. In my youth I can remember how impressed I was seeing rhinos in the movie *Hatari*, chasing, and being chased by, John Wayne. Unfortunately those days are gone. The White Rhino has been extirpated from the wild and the Black Rhino survives commonly only in the dense forests away from the poachers' guns and knives. After all these years I am still fascinated by the rhinoceros, and our visit to the Ark would likely be my only chance to see one in the wild.

We arrived at the Ark, found our rooms, and waited for the show to begin. The main stage is at the "bow" of the Ark where two ponds and a salt lick attract animals. The most exciting bird watching is from the "stern" where a boardwalk skirts a deep valley. At 6:30 a staff member placed fruit scraps on a bird feeder. This daily ritual draws dozens of birds out of the dense foliage. At first the feeder was overwhelmed with Yellow-vented Bulbuls and mousebirds. Gradually the more secretive species appeared like Olive Thrush, Hartlaub's Turaco, and Tropical Boubou. Beth Hansen and Janet Wessel spotted a mongoose attempting to make a meal of the birds that had come in to feed. There was so much activity that there was no way to see everything.

As the sun went down and lights came up on the ponds, the main show was about to begin. From the edge of the forest, numerous eyes reflected the lights back from the dark. When they saw it was safe, groups of Thomson's Gazelles and Impala visited the ponds. Elephants appeared by ones and twos. Occasionally the elephants would lock horns and have little territorial displays over the pond. After visiting the pond, one pair of elephants seemed to thoroughly enjoy scratching their rumps on a rocky outcropping before walking off into the darkness.

As the night got later the crowd thinned until there were only four of us

left watching the ponds: Janet, another American woman from a different tour, a young photographer in the ground-level bunker, and myself. For a long time the only activity was a Cape Buffalo wallowing in the mud. Janet and I studied the Green and Common sandpipers that fed under the lights, then we were fortunate to see an African Snipe walk into the open. It was after midnight when an elephant joined the buffalo. The potential for a confrontation between the two large animals was enough to rouse me from near slumber. A short time later we saw large animals that turned out to be Lions moving at the edge of the lights beyond the far pond. We alerted the guards and they came to watch. One of the guards spotted another large animal away from the Lions. Suddenly a flock of Egyptian Geese burst into flight, frightened by something we couldn't see. And then the guard's animal walked into the light—it was a rhino! It walked toward the pond with the buffalo and elephant and paused just before reaching the water. The buffalo and elephant became alert when they noticed the rhinoceros. It continued on to the pond. This intruder did not please the elephant. The two animals gestured and snorted at each other, a small skirmish erupted and the elephant retreated into the night. The guard activated bells in the rooms of people who wanted to see the rhinoceros, and soon the viewing areas were packed. I watched the rhino until I couldn't stay awake any longer, and so, elated, I went off to bed.

Thursday. After a little birding and breakfast, we boarded the buses that took us out of the mountains and back to meet John and Joseph. With the vans loaded we headed west. We made a brief stop at breathtaking Nyahururu Falls and then the highway took us south into the Rift Valley. As the road worked its way to the valley floor we passed fields of tea and coffee on our way to the place that Roger Tory Peterson described as "the most fabulous bird spectacle in the world," Lake Nakuru.

At the gate of Nakuru National Park, Francis paid our fare while we surveyed the trees for woodpeckers. Our first

destination was not the lake. We traveled through the woods and then took a road up the side of a sheer cliff. At the top was a picnic area with a group of school-children out on a field trip. The lake far below was a spectacular sight, the blue sky reflected on the still and shimmering water. Occasionally, what appeared to be pink clouds would rise off the surface and then settle back down in another area; of course the clouds were just thousands of Lesser Flamingos flying from one spot to another. After enjoying the breathtaking view, we set out along the cliff's edge to find the two animals we had come to see. It only took a few minutes to find a Rock Hyrax, supposedly an elephant relative, but looking and acting more like a tailless marmot. We scanned the cliff face, until someone spotted the Cliffchats, beautiful, black, robin-sized birds with rusty underparts and a white wing patch. We watched them at close range until they had seen enough of us and glided off the cliff's edge.

John and Joseph drove us along the edge of the lake to a point where large flocks of flamingos were feeding. Although flamingos can number in the millions on Lake Nakuru, we had to settle for only tens of thousands of the lanky pink waders. Their abundance on the lake is tied to the availability of water elsewhere; probably the flock we saw at Amboseli would be here in drier times. For those of us who could pull our gaze away from the flamingos, there were other birds along the shore to see: Gray-headed Gulls, Whiskered Terns, and, in with a group of Ruffs, a Spotted Redshank. I spotted a rare bird for Africa, and one that I had been looking for, a Red-necked Stint. It is an unmistakable peep in breeding plumage, and this bird looked just like the ones I had seen in Alaska ten years earlier. No sooner had I spotted the stint than I felt a pain in my side that felt as if I was being stabbed with a hot poker. In my half-awake state at the Ark I had absentmindedly brushed my teeth with tap water and was now paying the price. The rest of the day was something of a blur for me. We made our way southeast to the Safariland Lodge at Lake Naivasha where I went straight to bed. I was fortunate to be with a wonderful group of travelers who were a great assistance to me,

especially Laurel and Ollic Feigenbaum who were real angels. Two weeks earlier I had left San Francisco with eleven practical strangers, and over the course of our travels we had become eleven true friends.

Friday. Feeling much better I joined the group for breakfast. After eating we met at a small dock at Lake Naivasha's edge. Francis had arranged for two boats to take us out around the lake. Out on the water groups of hippos eyed us as our boats struggled with the water hyacinth. In places the hyacinth was so thick an African Fish Eagle used it as a perch from which to fish. From the boats, we explored small papyrus-lined coves invisible from shore and got good looks at the delicate coloring of Squacco Herons along with other waders.

On the road again, we headed for Hell's Gate National Park. Once past the entrance gate, a road took us into a deep gorge lined with vertical stone cliffs. We watched zebra, gazelle, and Wildebeest grazing next to the road as we followed it deeper into the gorge. Joseph and John parked the vans next to an enormous volcanic plug called Fischer's Tower where Stonechats and Schalow's Wheat-ears hawked for insects. The tower was named for the explorer, Dr. Gustav Fischer, who was ambushed at the sight by Masai warriors in 1882. We continued along the road to a picnic area where we were met by an armed soldier who was to escort us down a trail leading into a beautiful, deep ravine, but unfortunately it appeared to be too torturous for some of us, so we decided to get an early start to our trip's final destination, the Masai Mara, instead. When we stopped to check out at the entrance gate, a striking metallic bronze and green Didric Cuckoo appeared behind the guard's house.

Hell's Gate was beautiful, but the road that led to the Mara was hell. Built by the Italians in World War II, the road was so pocked with potholes, it looked as though it had been the center of the conflict. John and Joseph drove the vans along the dusty shoulder wherever possible, and only returned to the blacktop as a last resort. Eventually we hit smooth pavement and with purgatory over, we stopped for a picnic lunch. The

lunch wasn't great, but there was a stream next to our tables that attracted Paradise Flycatcher and the purplish-black Indigo Bird. A peddler treated Ollie to a demonstration of Masai binoculars—a strand of beads twisted in the center making a loop for each eye.

We continued southwest through small towns and past large herds of fenced, grazing cattle. Eventually the road became rough again and we began to see the Masai herding their unrestrained cattle off on the rolling green and gold hills. We had followed the Rift Valley to a point where it broadened into a vast grassland at the Kenya/Tanzania border. In Kenya this area is known as the Masai Mara, across the border in Tanzania it is called the Serengeti. We had arrived.

Our last days in Kenya were spent at the Sienna Springs Tented Camp. The tents were built on small platforms which were spread out on both sides of a stream that snaked through the grounds. The plain canvas exterior of the tents belied what was revealed when the front door was unzipped. Inside the tents were two beds, tables with brass lamps, a large closet, and complete bathroom. The interior was built of beautifully varnished wood. It certainly was not the claustrophobic nylon cocoon of a tent I was used to.

Saturday. I was awakened before sunrise by a return of the discomfort in my side, but fortunately it was only a fraction of the original pain. The group was to spend the entire day out on the Mara, and I decided that it would be best if I stayed behind. I did not want to risk forcing everyone to come back if the pain increased, so they wished me well before leaving for Kenya's most famous game reserve. Initially I was disappointed that I would be missing the Masai Mara. To make the most of my last full day in Kenya, I set a chair and my scope out on the lawn to watch the birds coming to a small pool. There were birds everywhere and Slate-colored Boubous sang ducts from the trees. When I spotted a bird I had been searching for the whole trip, a Bare-faced Go-away-bird, I just couldn't stay seated any longer, I had to get up and walk around. In my ramblings I spotted: Chin-spot Flycatcher, Wattle-eye Fly-

catcher, and Gray-capped Warbler. The hummingbird-like Sunbirds were well represented. I found the green, blue and yellow Variable Sunbird, and there were also the larger Hunter's, Scarlet-chested, and Amethyst sunbirds whose metallic gorgets are set off by their entirely velvet black plumage. By the afternoon, my health and spirits were much better. I had identified close to fifty species and had one of the most enjoyable days of birding in my life.

When Francis and company returned from the game drive they reported seeing two new species, Topi, a chestnut-colored antelope, and Heuglin's Courser, a brown-and-black-striped plover-like bird. The highlight of the drive for almost everyone was watching a pair of mating Lions.

Sunday. Francis and I led a morning bird walk around the campground. The advantage of my having stayed behind was that I was able to show everyone many of the birds I had seen the day before. After breakfast we loaded our bags into the vans and departed for the local airfield. Even in the last moments of our trip there were new sights, like an Egyptian Vulture soaring along a ridge. Just before we reached the airfield we spotted two vans watching something intently. John and Joseph made a slight detour and pulled up along side the other vans. There on a rocky outcropping a few feet away was a mother Lion suckling her young cubs. It was as if there before us was all of Africa, beauty and strength, tenderness and violence, the past, present and the future. At the airstrip we piled out of the vans for group pictures as the sound of the approaching airplane grew louder. Just before the plane touched down a giraffe needed to be herded away from the runway. The shiny aluminum DC-3 touched down on the dirt runway and glided to a stop. As the crew loaded our luggage, we said good-bye to John and Joseph. We filed in, sat down and buckled up. The doors were latched, the propellers sputtered then roared, and then we were airborne. As the plane gained altitude and the Masai Mara dropped away below us, it was hard to accept that this was the end of our great adventure. We had seen elephants, giraffes, Lions,

Leopards, Cheetahs and the Black Rhino! We had spotted well over three hundred species of birds of every shape and color. I knew that in less than two days I would be back in San Francisco. Although it seemed to the contrary, I knew that this wasn't a dream, and so this trip to Kenya was really a dream come true.

I would like to thank the Golden Gate Audubon Society and Park East Tours, Francis Kitayi, John and Joseph. Special thanks to Jill Bryans, Ruth Dement, Laurel and Ollie Feigenbaum, Beth Hansen, Pat and Jerry Johnson, Benson Lee, Kay Mac Caskie, Janet Wessel, and Russ Wilson for being a great group and making it all possible!

Alan Hopkins

Note: Alan will be talking about Kenya and showing his slides at the monthly meeting on March 9 in San Francisco. See further information on the Backpage.

KENYA, 1995

Adventures like these could be yours also. GGAS plans a repeat of last summer's successful trip to Kenya from August 4 to 21, 1995, led again by Kenya's Francis Kitayi and GGAS's Alan Hopkins. The trip features deluxe accommodations, abundant wildlife, both bird and mammal, and visits to many of the major parks in Kenya.

Travel arrangements will be made by Park East Tours and the projected cost is \$4,395 which includes round-trip air-fare from San Francisco and a \$200 donation to Golden Gate Audubon. For information on the next safari to Kenya, call Alan at (415) 664-0983, or the GGAS office at (510) 843-2222.

BIRDATHON 1995

**See Birds! Compete for Prizes!
Raise money for Mono Lake and
GGAS Education Efforts! Form
a team and become part of
Birdathon 1995.**

Complete details in the April *Gull*, but in the meantime, call the office, (510) 843-2222, with the name of your team and its members so you can receive your share of the free publicity.

(See p. 31 for information about Murphy's Mob.)

News from the Ranch

Dan Murphy

I'm sad to report the loss of ACR's very good friend and former president, Bob Conrath. Bob was a leader of ACR when I first joined the board and was the kind of guy who really made an impression. He was a birder, a world traveler, one of the most knowledgeable people I ever met about world affairs, and he had a marvelously wry humor. His counsel was respected, his friendship valued and his love for nature and his fellow man unquestioned. Bob was a friend ACR will miss, but, more importantly, he was a man who will be missed by everyone whose lives he touched.

Public Season Begins March 18

It's that time again. With all the rain, the hills will be greener than Ireland. The earliest wildflowers will be in bloom and the birds will be in. The herons arrived by the end of January and the egrets will certainly be waiting for our first visitors. The trails will still be a little damp, but the hiking will be great.

If you're a behavior watcher, this is certainly the time to spend an hour or two at the overlook checking out the herons and egrets as they establish and defend territories, build nests, and just hang around. You can really enhance your visit by reading a little about nesting behavior in one of the many books about heron and egret life histories. Try Helen Pratt's *Hérons & Egrets of Audubon Canyon Ranch*, the Stokes guide to *Bird Behavior*, vol. 3, or Bent's *Life Histories of North American Marsh Birds*. When you visit the Ranch, bring a notebook in addition to that picnic lunch, binoculars, and a field guide. Record your observations in the notebook and by next year it will become your personal guide to the Ranch.

Hosting at the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve

It's always interesting and enjoyable greeting people as they begin their visit to the Ranch. It's great seeing how excited people are when they see the Ranch for the first time. It's even better when they stop by and tell you how much they've enjoyed their visit. As a bonus, you will probably have enough time to take a hike to the heronry, and if we have enough hosts, you should be able to get away long enough to hike one of the longer trails. So there it is. You can have a great day at the Ranch and help our visitors have a very special day too. GGAS is scheduled to provide hosts for the weekend dates of March 18 through 26, and July 4 and weekend dates to July 16. Call (510) 843-2222 to volunteer.

Harbor Seal Study at Tomales Bay

This is the 5th year of our Harbor Seal Census/Disturbance Study. We need volunteers who can make a commitment of at least 5 sessions of 4 to 5 hours each. The job is to count Harbor Seals and disturbances to them at Tomales Bay. If you are interested, please call Mary Ellen King at (707) 537-1546.

North Bay Counties Heron/Egret Project (HEP)

Here's another study in its fifth year. It's our survey of regional heron and egret populations. Although the study is underway, we continue to need field observers who can make a minimum 4-day commitment between March and June. You don't need a lot of experience. We'll provide the necessary information to help you join the ranks of our field observers who monitor heronries throughout the North Bay. If you can help, please call John Kelly at (415) 663-8203.

Spring Work Days

Sunday, March 5, marks the work day at the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve. It includes a free lunch if you'll come and help us get ready for our public season.

Saturday, April 29, is our work day for the Cypress Grove Preserve. There is a lot to do maintaining this very beautiful preserve. You'll have time to look around for spring migrants, but there is no free lunch so be sure to bring your own. Register for either or both by calling (415) 868-9422.

Guided Nature Walks at BAP

Our schedule of half-day, docent-guided walks at the Bouverie Audubon Preserve in Glen Ellen is set. Spring is incredible in the Sonoma hills. Between the nesting birds and the spring wildflowers, this is a walk you don't want to miss. Our dates for these free walks are March 4 and 18, April 1 and 15, and May 5 and 27. Reservations are taken at the beginning of the month preceding the trip by calling (707) 938-4554.

Upcoming Seminars

Spring Wildflowers: A Personal Introduction with John Petersen at the Bouverie Audubon Preserve. Sunday, April 2. \$10 individual/\$20 family of 4 or fewer.

The Ecology of Herons & Egrets at Bolinas Lagoon Preserve. Saturday, May 20. \$10 individual/\$20 family of 4 or fewer.

ACR Research Update by John Kelly

ACR recently completed two scientific studies related to natural resources of Tomales Bay. John Kelly, Jules Evens, Rich Stallcup, and David Wimpfheimer completed a report to the California Department of Fish and Game (Sept., 1994) on "The use of aquaculture areas by wintering shorebirds at Walker Creek Delta, Tomales Bay, California." The five-year study documented avoidance of oyster-growing areas by Dunlin and Western Sandpipers and exploitation by Willets, and concluded that, overall, shorebirds avoid areas developed for aquaculture. In another paper, John Kelly and Grant Fletcher assessed the distribution and habitat characteristics of the rare plant species, Point Reyes bird's beak (*Cordylanthus maritimus* ssp. *palustris*; Scrophulariaceae) on Tomales Bay (1994, *Madrono* 41:316-327). This species is considered rare throughout its range. It is threatened by loss of coastal salt marsh habitat, and is a "C2" candidate for federal endangered species listing.

Observations: January 5 - February 6

Daniel Singer

LOONS TO DUCKS

Monterey's two **Yellow-billed Loons** continued to be seen sporadically with the immature bird off the Esplanade February 4 (DLSh) and the adult off Cannery Row at the Monterey Plaza Hotel February 7 (DRo). The Laysan Albatross at the Point Arena cove, MEN, continued through February 5 (m.ob.). A trip to the Cordell Bank, MRN, February 5, produced a Flesh-footed Shearwater (DSh). Most amazing is another report of **Manx Shearwater**. This one was 3.4 miles north of Point Pinos, MTY, on February 4 (DLSh). Perhaps it's the same individual reported on the Santa Cruz CBC in December.

A **Whooper Swan** discovered in Colusa on January 17 (BWb) was still present through February 4 (m.ob.). It was associating with large flocks of Tundra Swans and often difficult to find. This species winters in very small numbers in the western and central Aleutians. There have been several records from south of Alaska and virtually all of these are known escapes or birds suspected of being so. There is currently one accepted record from California, a bird in nearby Grimes in 1984, though this record remains controversial. Perhaps the only valid record of Whooper Swan in North America outside of Alaska is a specimen from Maine in 1903, which presumably came from the extirpated Greenland breeding colony. A "blue" morph Ross' Goose was at Merced NWR, MER, from January 15 - 28 (PEG, DES). The **Emperor Goose** at Bodega, SON, remained through the end of the period providing easy viewing for many. Blue-winged Teal and Eurasian Wigeon were well reported from numerous locations. Previously reported Tufted Ducks in San Francisco, Sunnyvale and Alviso continued through January (m.ob.) and two additional reports include one from Corte Madera, MRN, on January 8 (RS) and Lake County's first at Upper Lake, January 16, off Hwy. 20 (JRW). Up to five

Oldsquaws at Princeton Harbor, SM, on January 29 is impressive (RSTh).

RAPTORS TO ALCIDS

Six Ferruginous Hawks were "hunting and roosting together" near Livermore January 28 - February 3 (RRe, AMd). This species occasionally forms large communal roosts as evidenced by over 100 seen this winter at a site in southern Monterey County. A Peregrine Falcon reported from Paicines Reservoir, SBT, on February 5 is exceptional (LCh) but not unexpected in light of this species' recovery.

Twenty-seven Mountain Plovers north of Hollister, SBT, on January 6 (RMrr) were close to Santa Clara County where there are very few records. The stormy weather no doubt contributed to three Red Phalaropes being off the Berkeley, ALA, waterfront, January 15 with another at Valley Ford, SON, on January 16 (WEH). More expected are 147 seen from Pigeon Point, SM, on January 24 (BS fide RSTh).

Certainly not expected is a report of a Parasitic Jaeger "hunting gophers" over a field at Pigeon Point, January 24 (BS fide RSTh). Though it may be the year of the boar, it must be the winter of the Glaucous Gull. Reports are too numerous to list but a small sampling includes up to three in SF between January 15 - 28 (DSg, DPM), four in Alviso, SCL, on January 22 (PJM), three at Goat Rock, SON, January 26 (ADeM), "several" on a trip to the Cordell Bank, February 5 (DSh) and even a road kill found along Hwy. 1 at Marshall, MRN, in early January (RS). Ancient Murrelets continue in good numbers in Monterey Bay with 14 seen on a pelagic trip February 4 (DLSh). Thirty-five Rhinoceros Auklets were off Pigeon Point, January 24 (BS fide RSTh) and a Tufted Puffin seen on the February 5 Cordell Bank trip may be a first winter record of this species for that area (DSh).

HUMMINGBIRDS TO SHRIKES

Allen's Hummingbirds returned to our region on schedule. One was at Tunitas Creek, SM, on January 15 (RSTh)

and seven were at Lake Merced, SF, January 23 (PJM). Wintering Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers continued at Davis, YOL, through January 24 (JMR), Milpitas, SCL, through February 3 (SCR) (not San Jose as erroneously reported last month) and Monte Rio, SON, through January 7 (DSh).

Eastern Phoebe here for the winter were present through January 24 in Davis, YOL (JMR), and February 2 in both San Jose, SCL (SCR) and Point Reyes Station, MRN (KB). Impressively early Barn Swallows appeared on January 29 with three at Bodega Head, SON (AWt) and one in Millbrae, SM (PJM). A Sedge Wren reported January 15 in Fremont would be at an unprecedented time of year (previous accepted records include three in fall and one in summer). Reports such as this are difficult to evaluate without details and it is hoped that thorough documentation will be provided to the CBRC for appropriate review. Five Townsend's Solitaires were reported from Mt. St. Helena, SON, on January 15 (DSh) and one was present at the Monticello Dam, SOL, January 17 - February 2 (JMR, LLu). Two Sage Thrashers along the BLM Road off Little Panoche Valley Road, FRE, February 4 (fide SA) are from an expected locale. Bohemian Waxwings continue east of the Sierras with 30 at Mono Lake County Park in Lee Vining, MON, February 5 (m.ob.). Three Northern Shrikes were reported from MON January 14 through February 2 (m.ob.).

WARBLERS TO GROSBEAKS

The Lucy's Warbler in San Francisco since late November remained through at least January 23 (PJM). A Yellow Warbler in Mountain View, SCL, January 13 was where one wintered last year (SCR). A female **Black-throated Blue Warbler** in Clear Lake, LAK, January 3 - 17 is a county first (fide JRW). Three Palm Warbler reports were all from SM (MCM, PJM, RSTh). A Black-and-white Warbler at Point Reyes Station, January 13 (RS)

augmented four other reports of previously-seen individuals from MTY, SM and SON (m.ob.) and the Northern Waterthrush at Bodega Bay remained through at least January 21 (DSh).

A Western Tanager, always a nice find in winter, was in Mountain View, February 3 (MCM). A Green-tailed Towhee in San Jose returned for the second consecutive winter January 29 - February 3 (SCR). Two Sharp-tailed Sparrows continued to be reported at the Palo Alto Baylands, SCL, through January 28 (m.ob.). A Harris' Sparrow west of Crowley Lake in Mono County, January 23 - February 4, is the only one reported to-date this season (fide ES, KGH). One Lapland Longspur and two Chestnut-collared Longspurs were seen again at the summit of Sierra Road east of San Jose, SCL January 14 (NLe).

Up to 15 - 20 Great-tailed Grackles wintering in Benton, MON, and reported January 20, constitute a significant range expansion for this species in our region (fide ES). An Orchard Oriole was at Fort Mason, SF, on January 15 (MMcC) and a Northern Oriole was at Lake Merced, January 31 (JMR).

The monthly observation column is generated from reports made to the Northern California Bird Box. Some sightings are unconfirmed and numbers of birds are often best regarded as estimates or "best guesses". In general, birds in boldface are very rare in our region, geographically or seasonally. Many of these are currently reviewed by the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC). Observers are encouraged to provide written and/or photographic documentation to the CBRC, c/o Michael Patten, P.O. Box 51959, Riverside, CA 92517-2959 for any species currently on the review list. A list of review species can also be obtained from the CBRC secretary at the address above.

Observers: Dick Ashford, Bob Atkins, Florence Bennett, Bob Brandriff, George Chaniot, Les Chibana, Al DeMartini, Jack Dineen, Al Eisner, Gil Ewing, Mike Feighner, Steve Glover, Phil Gordon, Steve Hampton, Keith Hansen, W. Ed Harper, Kevin Hints, Alan Hopkins, Cin-ty Lee, Nick Lethaby, Leslie Lieurance, Michael Mammoser, Mac McCormick, Jack McKean, Bert McKee, Bob Merrill, Peter Metropulos, Mark Miller, Alan Mode, Joe Morlan, Dick Norton, David Powell, Peter Pyle, Rick Renaud, Jean Richmond, Robert Richmond, Don Roberson, Mike Rogers, Steve Rottenborn, Ruth Rudesill, Barry Sauppe, Don Schmoldt, Doug Shaw, Debra Shearwater, Dan Singer, Rich Stallcup, Emilie Strauss, Scott Terrill, Ron Thorn, Dorothy Tobkin, Bruce Webb, Jerry White, Alan Wight, Adam Wincer. Data thanks to Joe Morlan and the Northern California Bird Box.

Abbreviations for counties: ALA, Alameda; BUT, Butte; CC, Contra Costa; COL, Colusa; LAK, Lake; MEN, Mendocino; MER, Merced; MON, Mono; MRN, Marin; MTY, Monterey; SAC, Sacramento; SBT, San Benito; SCL, Santa Clara; SCZ, Santa Cruz; SF, San Francisco; SHA, Shasta; SM, San Mateo; SOL, Solano; SON, Sonoma; TRI, Trinity; YOL, Yolo

VENEZUELA ACTION ALERT

The Sociedad Conservacionista Audubon de Venezuela has sent a plea for help. They need many letters of protest from people interested in saving tropical rainforest. Along with indigenous people who depend on the Caroni River for their livelihood and other local conservation groups, they have been fighting gold mining in the headwaters of the Caroni River in Bolivar State (home of the Gran Sabana and Angel Falls) and need assistance from people outside Venezuela. The mining concessions awarded by the Corporacion Venezolana de Guayana, (a government agency where many high officials have been accused of corruption in recent years), to companies from Canada, USA, U.K., Japan, and South Africa extend over miles of land covered by primary lowland rainforest, amid some of the most pristine and species-rich ecosystems in the world, and on the watersheds of two of the largest black-water rivers in South America. The government has not made the necessary adjustments among its regulatory agencies to cope with the ever-expanding mining. Thus, the mining companies are thriving, especially where they are allowed to operate virtually free from tax collectors and environmental supervision, but at great cost to the environment.

Please assist by writing to the Venezuelan government and imploring them to implement effective enforcement of tax collection and environmental regulations, and to develop long-term, wide-range planning. Remind them that sustainable uses of the forest are both socially and economically more beneficial and that many people in the world care about stopping the corruption that allows the mining companies to disregard environmental regulations.

Please send your politely-worded letters to:

Sr. Ministro de la Secretaria de la Presidencia
Palacio de Miraflores
Caracas, Venezuela

Sr. Gobernador del Estado Bolivar
Palacia de la Gobernacion
Ciudad Bolivar, Venezuela

Copies of your letters to:

Sociedad Conservacionista Audubon de Venezuela
Aptdo. 80450
Caracas 1080-A, Venezuela

(Airmail postage is 50 cents.)



Craig Latker

BIRDING CLASS IN S.F. INTRODUCTION TO AVIAN FIELD I.D. AND HABITATS OF CENTRAL COASTAL CALIFORNIA

with Dan Murphy

4 lectures, Thursdays, April 20--May 11,
7:00--9:00 p.m.

3 field trips, Saturdays, April 22-- May 6,
8:00--11:00 a.m.

This class will focus on field identification of migratory and nesting species of the San Francisco Peninsula. The class will include 3 field trips and 4 slide-enhanced lectures. We will discuss various Bay Area habitats for both migrants and nesting species. We plan to visit Mountain View Shoreline, Lake Merced, Fort Funston, and Golden Gate Park. Lectures will be held at the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. Cost is \$110 for Academy and Audubon Society members. Academic credit is available through San Francisco State University for an additional \$35.

Field Trips Calendar

Wednesday, March 8

Mini-trip to Mitchell Canyon

Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301, & Jean-Marie Spoelman. For details, see *The Gull* for February.

Saturday, March 11

Birds of Strybing Arboretum, Golden Gate Park

Meet at 8 a.m. at the front gate of the arboretum (near Ninth Ave. and Lincoln Way). We will be looking for spring birds that are attracted to this varied habitat. Beginners (and all others) welcome. Leader: Alan Ridley (415) 566-3241.

Saturday, March 18

San Francisco Bird Blitz

In this annual blitz we expect to tally over 100 different species within the city limits. This year's mad dash, hoping to exceed all previous records, will begin at 7 a.m. sharp.

Meet at the north end of Van Ness Ave. (past North Point - the last cross-street) at the foot of Municipal Pier. From there we will caravan to other sites including Golden Gate Park, Sutro Baths, Lake Merced, and Candlestick Point. Bring lunch and liquids. We will bird until dusk, then adjourn to a nearby restaurant where we will recap the day's observations, and, for a minimal cost, we can avoid going home to cook dinner. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415) 664-0983. (*)

Saturday/Sunday, March 18-19

Honey Lake

Call for detailed directions. Trip will be limited to 20 participants. Lodging is available in Susanville; primitive camping is also available. Be sure to bring warm clothing, lunches for both days, and a scope if you have one. We should see Sage Grouse, Bald Eagles, and other birds of the eastern Sierra. Leader: Bob Hirt (408) 446-4478. (*)

Sunday, March 19

Sunol Regional Park

Meet at 8:30 a.m. inside the park entrance at the parking lot on the left. Take I-680 south, turn off at Calaveras Rd. (the freeway sign is marked: Calaveras Rd., Dumbarton Bridge, Calif. 84). Go south (left) and follow the signs to Sunol Regional Park, about five miles. Bring lunch and liquids. (Park regulations prohibit alcoholic beverages.) We should see Golden Eagles, a variety of winter residents and early spring migrants. This trip is also good for wildflowers. Leaders: Ron Lindeman (510) 521-2324 and Leora Feeney. \$ (*)

Saturday, March 25

Richardson Bay Wildlife Sanctuary

Meet at 10 a.m. at Audubon Center in the Wildlife Sanctuary, 376 Greenwood Rd., in Tiburon. From Hwy. 101 take the Belvedere/Tiburon exit; go east and turn right at the third traffic light, Greenwood Cove Rd., then make an immediate left.

At 10 a.m. we will enjoy a 45-minute slide show, then from 11

until 12 we will look for birds along the trail. After lunch, we will have a shoreline walk from 1 until 2:30. There should be several thousand birds on the water, and a variety of shorebirds. We may be able to see courting Western Grebes. The day will end with a brief tour of the historic Lyford House. Bring lunch and a scope if you have one. Leader: Ranger, Bill Bixby (415) 388-2524. (*)

Saturday, April 1

Bodega Bay

Meet at 9 a.m. at the intersection of Hwy. 1 and East Shore Rd., one-half mile north of Diekmann's Bay Store. We will bird for spring migrants in Bodega Harbor and Bodega Head, observing waterfowl and shorebirds in their spring plumage. Bring lunch and liquids.

If you arrive Friday, lodging is available at the Best Western Motel (707) 875-3525, and the Bodega Court Inn (707) 875-2217. There are nice campsites at the Dune's State Park (\$) just north of our meeting place, but plan to get there early to be sure of getting a spot, or call Ticketron to reserve one. Leader: Nancy Konzett (707) 875-2231, Bodega Bay. (*)

Sunday, April 2

Hayward Regional Shoreline

Meet at 9 a.m. (daylight savings time) in the parking lot at the Visitors' Center. From I-880 in the East Bay, take the Jackson St. exit west toward the San Mateo Bridge, then take Clawiter exit. Continue across Clawiter and take an immediate left onto Breakwater. Continue on Breakwater to the Visitors' Center. From the West Bay, cross the San Mateo Bridge and take the Eden Landing exit, then left, back across the freeway, and left again on Breakwater.

We should see a variety of waterfowl and shorebirds on this half-day trip. Leader: Rusty Scalf (510) 523-7108. (*)

Saturday, April 8

Point Reyes National Seashore

Meet at 8 a.m. at the Bovine Bakery on Rt. 1 in downtown Pt. Reyes Station, two miles north of Olema. We will concentrate on shorebird identification at Abbott's Lagoon. Bring a scope if you have one, lunch, and liquids, and wear comfortable walking shoes. Heavy rain cancels. (If in doubt, call.) Leaders: Lina Jane Prairie and Neil Whitehouse (510) 526-7025. (*)

Sunday, April 9

Bothe-Napa Valley State Park

Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot. This is a particularly beautiful park in the spring, with migrating warblers and vireos, Winter Wrens and, if we're lucky, Pileated Woodpeckers. We will walk about four to five miles and bird mostly by ear.

From the East Bay: drive north on I-80 beyond Vallejo and take the Napa exit. Follow Hwy. 29 to St. Helena. The entrance to the park is on the left just past the Ole Bale Mill north of St. Helena.

From the West Bay: take Hwy. 101 north to Hwy. 37 near Novato; go east to the junction with Hwy. 121; turn left and continue on 121 until it joins Hwy. 29 near Napa, then continue north on 29 to the Park.

Beginners welcome. Bring lunch and liquids. Rain cancels trip. Please carpool if possible. Leader: Peter Allen (415) 892-2910. \$ (*)

Wednesday, April 12

Mini-trip to Sunol Regional Park

Meet at 9 a.m. at the Ranger Station parking lot inside the park. Take Hwy. 680 south to about eight miles beyond the intersection of Hwy. 580. Turn off at Calaveras Rd.; go left and follow the signs to Sunol Regional Park. We may see Lark Sparrows, Golden Eagles, and Northern Orioles plus resident birds of the area. Bring lunch. Rain cancels trip. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301, and Jean-Marie Spoelman. \$ (*)

Sunday, April 16

Golden Gate Park

Traditional Easter walk. We will meet at 9:30 a.m. at 43rd Ave. and Fulton St., near North Lake (Chain of Lakes) for a walk around the various lakes in the vicinity. There is a variety of waterfowl and songbirds to be seen and at least two species of hummingbirds. After the walk we will have a champagne brunch (approx. \$15) at nearby Thiggy's Restaurant in Lincoln Park. (Reservations not required.) Leader: Mike Healy (415) 664-3654.

Trips marked with \$ go to parks and other sites that require an entrance fee.

Carpooling arrangements will be attempted for trips marked (*). See below.

Problems: if you need a ride or can take a passenger, or if you need information and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, call Russ Wilson, Field Trips Committee Chair (510) 524-2399.



1994 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Oak	SF				
15	51	Red-throated Loon	13	23	Red-shouldered Hawk
0	12	Pacific Loon	150	92	Red-tailed Hawk
40	23	Common Loon	1	0	Ferruginous Hawk
2	550	loon, sp.	1	0	Buteo, sp.
201	131	Pied-billed Grebe	6	0	Golden Eagle
93	21	Horned Grebe	6	0	adult(s)
33	12	Eared Grebe	0	1	eagle, sp.
254	485	Western Grebe	64	52	American Kestrel
117	73	Clark's Grebe	12	5	Merlin
394	189	<i>Aechmophorus</i> , sp.	3	5	Peregrine Falcon
1	0	American White Pelican	182	61	California Quail
1	14	Brown Pelican	3	4	Clapper Rail
2583	90	Double-crested Cormorant	2	3	Virginia Rail
97	88	Brandt's Cormorant	5	0	Sora
9	4	Pelagic Cormorant	0	1	Common Moorhen
0	1	cormorant, sp.	3185	1248	American Coot
0	1	American Bittern	1908	512	Black-bellied Plover
37	23	Great Blue Heron	0	20	Snowy Plover
56	23	Great Egret	63	63	Semipalmated Plover
82	17	Snowy Egret	198	20	Killdeer
1	1	Cattle Egret	1	7	Black Oystercatcher
3	1	Green Heron	158	13	Black-necked Stilt
89	75	Black-crowned Night-Heron	2271	208	American Avocet
4	0	Greater White-fronted Goose	45	2	Greater Yellowlegs
1527	11	Canada Goose	1	0	Lesser Yellowlegs
1	0	Canada Goose (small forms)	1032	3011	Willet
62	0	goose, sp.	0	1	Wandering Tattler
4	2	Wood Duck	24	4	Spotted Sandpiper
1	0	Green-winged Teal (Eur.)	10	47	Whimbrel
237	1	Green-winged Teal (Am.)	169	16	Long-billed Curlew
1189	703	Mallard	1141	209	Marbled Godwit
634	2	Northern Pintail	12	19	Ruddy Turnstone
3	0	Blue-winged Teal	63	23	Black Turnstone
77	0	Cinnamon Teal	0	34	Surfbird
396	16	Northern Shoveler	55	0	Red Knot
384	10	Gadwall	860	1650	Sanderling
1	0	Eurasian Wigeon	11290	110	Western Sandpiper
1333	348	American Wigeon	670	31	Least Sandpiper
623	128	Canvasback	6757	65	Dunlin
75	0	Redhead	1320	3000	peep, sp.
157	77	Ring-necked Duck	182	25	Short-billed Dowitcher
1	1	Tufted Duck	14	CW	Long-billed Dowitcher
2399	94	Greater Scaup	2219	80	dowitcher, sp.
4579	232	Lesser Scaup	15	3	Common Snipe
15799	358	scaup, sp.	0	1	Red Phalarope
1	3	Oldsquaw	47	2	Bonaparte's Gull
0	57	Black Scoter	0	107	Heermann's Gull
8880	1974	Surf Scoter	1329	1814	Mew Gull
9	522	White-winged Scoter	2244	1655	Ring-billed Gull
693	67	Common Goldeneye	701	1212	California Gull
93	0	Barrow's Goldeneye	36	136	Herring Gull
1606	217	Bufflehead	0	21	Thayer's Gull
8	0	Hooded Merganser	1189	2043	Western Gull
87	0	Common Merganser	13	31	Western x Glaucous-winged Gull
57	16	Red-breasted Merganser	200	195	Glaucous-winged Gull
3244	1857	Ruddy Duck	0	2	Glaucous Gull
15	9	duck, sp.	0	735	white-winged gull, sp.
134	20	Turkey Vulture	1475	0	gull, sp.
14	3	Osprey	90	7	Forster's Tern
14	0	White-tailed Kite	0	5	Common Murre
1	0	Bald Eagle	0	2	Marbled Murrelet
25	6	Northern Harrier	2194	1963	Rock Dove
41	12	Sharp-shinned Hawk	387	118	Band-tailed Pigeon
16	6	Cooper's Hawk	1141	688	Mourning Dove
11	3	<i>Accipiter</i> , sp.	0	20	Canary-winged Parakeet
			5	1	Barn Owl
			7	0	Western Screech-Owl
			51	2	Great Horned Owl
			8	CW	Burrowing Owl
			1	0	Short-eared Owl
			2	0	Northern Saw-whet Owl

73	0	White-throated Swift
477	380	Anna's Hummingbird
4	0	<i>Selasphorus</i> , sp.
25	8	Belted Kingfisher
37	0	Acorn Woodpecker
20	6	Red-breasted Sapsucker
1	0	sapsucker, sp.
60	1	Nuttall's Woodpecker
25	35	Downy Woodpecker
16	1	Hairy Woodpecker
1	0	Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker
270	134	Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker
64	0	Northern Flicker
1	0	<i>Empidonax</i> , sp.
87	75	Black Phoebe
5	6	Say's Phoebe
2	0	Horned Lark
434	7	Steller's Jay
693	151	Scrub Jay
94	135	American Crow
53	166	Common Raven
799	253	Chestnut-backed Chickadee
89	0	Plain Titmouse
1846	566	Bushtit
126	2	Red-breasted Nuthatch
18	2	White-breasted Nuthatch
62	268	Pygmy Nuthatch
78	51	Brown Creeper
2	1	Rock Wren
111	21	Bewick's Wren
2	2	House Wren
20	51	Winter Wren
6	8	Marsh Wren
210	133	Golden-crowned Kinglet
669	346	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
165	4	Western Bluebird
172	113	Hermit Thrush
3196	2787	American Robin
743	80	Varied Thrush
209	59	Wrentit
62	36	Northern Mockingbird
39	7	California Thrasher
128	22	American Pipit
857	112	Cedar Waxwing
23	5	Loggerhead Shrike
6418	2535	European Starling
34	33	Hutton's Vireo
12	22	Orange-crowned Warbler
1	4	Nashville Warbler
0	1	Lucy's Warbler
0	1	Black-throated Blue Warbler
16	53	Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler
815	454	Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler
456	498	Yellow-rumped Warbler
67	195	Townsend's Warbler
0	2	Palm Warbler
0	1	Black-and-white Warbler
9	30	Common Yellowthroat
0	1	Wilson's Warbler
2	0	warbler, sp.
216	21	Rufous-sided (Spotted) Towhee
647	181	California Towhee
15	0	Rufous-crowned Sparrow
3	0	Lark Sparrow
66	48	Savannah Sparrow
186	321	Fox Sparrow
206	182	Song Sparrow
6	4	Lincoln's Sparrow
6	14	White-throated Sparrow
1545	965	Golden-crowned Sparrow

1375	1028	White-crowned Sparrow
3	0	Dark-eyed (Slate-col.) Junco
1882	466	Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco
835	389	Red-winged Blackbird
90	100	Tricolored Blackbird
497	251	Western Meadowlark
1037	1839	Brewer's Blackbird
407	115	Brown-headed Cowbird
0	1	Northern (Baltimore) Oriole
106	25	Purple Finch
1275	681	House Finch
465	63	Pine Siskin
188	11	Lesser Goldfinch
180	17	American Goldfinch
518	340	House Sparrow
125526	46817	Individuals
175	169	Species
1	1	Hybrids
235	?	Cumulative Species
159	76	Observers in the field
14	7	Observers at feeders
60	21	Parties
265	133.9	Hours on foot
33	9.8	Hours by car
10.75	0	Hours by boat
1.5	0	Hours by canoe
310.25	143.8	Total Party Hours
175.3	79.4	Miles on foot
270.5	149.8	Miles by car
47	0	Miles by boat
1.5	0	Miles by canoe
494.3	229.2	Total Party Miles
49.75	4	Feeder Hours
14.75	3	Owling Hours
14.5	9.5	Owling Miles

1994 OAKLAND CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Well, it was a fine day, no doubt about it. Good weather (except right at the edge of the bay), good birds, and good companionship combined, again, to make the Oakland CBC one of the best things to be doing during the holiday season. Our total of 125,526 individuals was a respectable number of birds. At 175, the number of species was higher than twelve of the previous 20 years, and within the range (164-180) of expected species. On the down side, there were low numbers of Horned Grebe, White-winged Scoter, and Long-billed Dowitcher. Counts of these species, however, may have been adversely affected by persistent fog on the Bay. We had high numbers of Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, Barrows Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawk, Merlin, Rock Dove, Common Raven, Orange-crowned Warbler, and [alas] Brown-headed Cowbird. Among the more exciting birds reported were a Tufted Duck (our first

since 1977), an Oldsquaw, a Bald Eagle, a Ferruginous Hawk, a Black Oystercatcher, a Lesser Yellowlegs, a Short-eared Owl, two House Wrens, and a Nashville Warbler. The cumulative number of species for the Oakland CBC now stands at 235.

173 people counted birds for the 1994 CBC. Many others volunteered in the GGAS office and at the count dinner. To each of you, both Janet and I send our thanks.

Kay Loughman, Co-Compiler

1994 SAN FRANCISCO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The 1994 San Francisco CBC was held on Dec. 28. We squeezed in between rain drops and our 76 observers had a rather pleasant, mostly sunny day in the field. Our species total of 169 was among our higher marks. Our total number of 46,817 birds was low for no apparent reason. This was our second lowest count in terms of total numbers. White-breasted Nuthatch, Western Bluebird, Lucy's Warbler and Black-throated Blue Warbler were new to our list. Again this year virtually all of our Black-bellied Plovers were observed on Sunset Reservoir, and Ocean Beach had very large numbers of Willets and Sanderlings.

Dan Murphy, Co-Compiler

DO YOU

Care about the Wetlands?
Care about the Old Growth?
Care about the Everglades?
Care about Migratory Birds?
Care about our Shorebirds?

THEN DO SOMETHING

JOIN THE AUDUBON ARM-CHAIR ACTIVIST TODAY

For only \$6.00 a year you can receive our monthly Activist Newsletter, write your letters, and make a difference. Send your name, address and phone # along with your check to: GGAS, 2530 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702.

Back Yard Birder

Meg Pauletich

Six years ago, my birding group visited Cypress Grove Preserve on Tomales Bay. It was a beautiful February day which I remember vividly, partly because of the unique bird activities we observed, but mostly because of the enthusiasm and knowledge of John Kelly, the resident biologist. He provided many bird identification tips, garnered during the frequent bird counts on the bay. He gave us all sorts of background information on the formation of the bay, which is a remarkable laboratory since it is one of the most pristine bays in California.

The last day of January, 1995, our group returned to CGP. In August, 1992, Mr. Clifford Conly formally presented the lands of CGP to Audubon Canyon Ranch, saving this priceless piece of land for future generations. It serves as ACR's center for field research and natural resource management. Fortunately, John Kelly continues to engage those who visit with further fascinating data from the past 6 years.

Along with most of California, Tomales Bay has been deluged this winter, decreasing the salinity of the bay. As a result, there are fewer shorebirds, since they feed on invertebrates common to salt-water shores. As we scoped the waterfowl, we observed a large flock of cormorants and other birds creating a big commotion as they flapped their wings while riding the water. Apparently they were atop a herring run, and seemed to be fish "herding" with their wing-flapping, similar to White Pelican behavior.

Here are some excerpts from the column I wrote after that visit six years ago:

"I recently had the privilege of visiting Cypress Grove Preserve, property acquired by Audubon Canyon Ranch. It is a gorgeous spot located on Tomales Bay. John Kelly, the enthusiastic resident biologist, gave us the background of the site, plus the plans for the future. It is hoped that the land can be restored to something close to its original state, by getting rid of non-native plants and replanting native grasses, which hopefully will attract more varieties of birds and animals. The hardest part will be attempting to arrest development of the fresh-water marsh in "middle age," when it has reached its maximum potential as

habitat. This entails the assistance of many volunteers.

"Cypress Grove is a birder's paradise, attracting shorebird, saltwater bay birds such as migrating Brant, which feed on eel grass, marsh inhabitants, as well as land birds. On our short visit we saw 49 species without really trying very hard. Some of the highlights were 3 Common Yellowthroats posing perfectly; a courting hummingbird making arcs in the sky; both the Audubon and Myrtle races of Yellow-rumped Warbler; several Black-crowned Night- Herons hunched in cypress trees; a Common Loon close to shore, "periscoping" with its head underwater, and laughing a few times; Ruddy and Black turnstones side-by-side actually turning over stones, a nice comparison; a Belted Kingfisher returning to his favorite perch time and time again; and a Northern Harrier cruising the grasslands. Later we were enthralled by a pair of harriers performing a courtship "sky dance," graceful, swift and full of dazzling aerobatics. The female landed atop a shrub, the male landed atop her and copulation took place very quickly.

"Having studied the Marsh Wren at length, John gave us some neat facts about this feisty little bird. In order to successfully attract a mate, the male builds several nests, allowing his bride to select just the right one. She then prepares the nursery by lining the nest with soft cattail fuzz. Marsh Wrens and Red-winged Blackbirds prefer the same habitat, but it was found that they will not nest in the same territory. The blackbirds have learned to steer clear of the small wrens, who get rid of the competition by tearing the blackbirds' nests apart, by piercing their eggs, or by removing baby blackbirds from their nests. Talk about a small bird complex! Oddly, this same rivalry does not extend to Tricolored Blackbirds who apparently require much less nesting territory and are much less aggressive. They don't seem to incur the dreaded Marsh Wren wrath. The Marsh Wren is so paranoid that he will defend his territory almost 24 hours a day!"

Six years later, Cypress Grove Preserve is just as enchanting as ever. I hope to return much more frequently for I think I've found birding paradise.

MURPHY'S MOB RIDES AGAIN

Join the official GGAS birdathon field trip with Dan Murphy for a great day of birding on the San Francisco Peninsula. This year, due to a previously-scheduled class which Dan will be teaching, Murphy's "mob" will kick-off the annual Audubon Society birdathon a couple of weeks early. The official date for GGAS is the weekend of April 22-23. Our "mob," many observers, will visit many of the Peninsula's greatest birding spots. You'll be able to enjoy a great day of birding with friends, see 100 - 125 species, finish the day with dinner at Celia's, and help GGAS in its major annual fund-raiser.

This year the money we raise will be shared between the National Audubon Society for ongoing expenses associated with Mono Lake, and GGAS for our education program. This is one of the very few GGAS field trips which carries a fee. Incredibly, you get to choose how much it's worth. Plan to see about a hundred species, then estimate your pledge per species to match the amount you want to donate. Of course, you can make a flat donation if you wish. You can help raise even more by asking friends to pledge for each species we see. Remember that ten pledges of a dime each will earn \$1 per bird. Of course, you are

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